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ABSTRACT

Possible impacts of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) criterion, Section III, Institutional Effectiveness, are considered. The way that one state university is approaching the new SACS' expectation on institutional effectiveness is examined. Attention is directed to: an effectiveness process model developed by a self-study committee; a matrix of effectiveness-related "must" statements underlying the criteria; and the involvement of an office of institutional research. The material is being tested by an ongoing self-study activity that includes 150 internal committee members and all organizational units. SACS developed the new "criteria" in December 1984 to replace its old "standards." The effectiveness criterion emphasizes the need for planning and evaluation procedures and for defining goals and assessment of the achievement of goals. The criterion does not require a written unified plan, a planning officer, or an office of institutional research/planning. Colleges have an opportunity to use their own creativity in responding to the accrediting group. If a college is to be reaccredited, the SACS' visitation team must answer affirmatively the group of effectiveness-related statements. Included is a matrix that provides an internal score card for self-analysis of the entire university. (SW)

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SACS' EFFECTIVENESS CRITERION: A SELF-ANALYSIS BASED UPON THE "MUST" STATEMENTS

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Abstract

The quality issue in higher education has been recognized and acted upon by the College Delegate Assembly of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). This paper reviews the possible impacts that SACS' Criterion, Section III, Institutional Effectiveness might have upon higher education. Based upon an on-going SACS' self-study process, an effectiveness process model, a matrix of SACS' effectiveness-related "must" statements underlying the Criteria, and a brief description of the involvement of an office of institutional research are presented.

SACS' Effectiveness Criterion: A Self-Analysis

Based Upon the "Must" Statements

Background, Issues and Purpose

The quality issue in higher education has been addressed by national panels, task forces, and accreditation agencies. These groups have focused frequently on student assessment and institutional effectiveness. Fincher (1983) reviewed several of these reports issued by national commissions and task forces. A common theme stressed was a desire for the improvement of academic competencies, although little guidance was offered to institutions in terms of which competencies need to be improved and which methodologies should be employed to measure these improvements. Fincher (p. 29) summarized this contradiction as follows:

> Thus, little guidance is given in a form that would facilitate the development of academic competencies, their assessment or measurement, and the establishment of their curricular or instructional validity. Virtually no mention is given to how students may acquire these competencies, whether or not public school teachers can or will teach such competencies, and the methods by which schools can develop such competencies effectively. In brief, national commissions and task forces have identified a national crisis in education, but wisely or unwittingly or cynically they have left the problems of definition, measurement, and instruction to the nation's schools and colleges.

A recent national survey, conducted by the American Council on Education, shows that universities are plagued by the same contradiction (El-Khawas, 1986). For instance, many university administrators favor assessment, but express uncertainty of how to solve the problem of definitions and measurements of student competencies. There is a wide gap between what is judged by numerous university administrators to be appropriate methods of assessment and what is

actually being used. There tends to be consistency in perceptions on appropriate assessment measures which is inconsistent with the major potential obstacle to implementation which is uncertainty on what to evaluate. The complexity of the quality issue at universities is underscored by a careful consideration of these survey results (p. 14-17) and the work of Tan (1986).

The emphasis on student assessment and institutional effectiveness is readily apparent in the new Criteria adopted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The Commission on Colleges of SACS developed Criteria (December, 1984) to replace its old Standards. In several years of committee work and discussions with the College Delegates Assembly, a major issue unfolded on one criterion: institutional effectiveness. Many presidents, who generally represent institutions as the voting delegates, recognized the task and expense of attempting to define and measure outcomes validly and reliably across academic departments, colleges or institutions. They feared misuse by external forces and were unwilling to commit their own institutions to the proposed criterion. A compromise was reached which entailed the elimination of all twelve references to "outcomes" (Rugg, 1984). What remained under Section III, Institutional Effectiveness is entitled 3.1 Planning and Evaluation and 3.2 Institutional Research. The preface to those sub-sections reads as follows:

> The quality of education provided by member institutions is the primary consideration in the decision to confer or reaffirm accreditation. The evaluation of educational quality is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment. Traditionally, accreditation has focused attention almost exclusively upon institutional resources and processes. It has usually been assumed that, if an institution has certain resources, effective education will occur. A comprehensive approach to accreditation, however, takes into account not only the resources and processes of education (such as faculty and student qualification, physical plant, fiscal resources and other elements addressed in the Criteria) but also the evaluation of the results of education and plans for the improvement of the institution's programs.

> The level of institutional quality depends not only on an institution's educational processes and resources but also on the institution's successful use of those processes and resources to achieve established goals. Institutions have an obligation to all constituents to evaluate effectiveness and to use the results in a broad-based, continuous planning and evaluation process (p.9).

The purpose of this paper is to describe how one state university is approaching the new SACS' expectation on "institutional effectiveness." The paper presents a) an effectiveness process model developed by one self-study committee; b) a matrix of effectiveness-related "must" statements underlying the Criteria; and c) a description of the involvement of an office of institutional research. The material presented is currently being tested by an on-going self-study activity which includes 150 internal committee members and all organizational units.

An Effectiveness Process Model

Historically, academic enterpreneurial spirit is one of the principal reasons for the rapid growth and development of some institutions. Under this concept, each academic or other budgetary unit has been responsible implicitly for the development of its own effectiveness process that is consistent with its own statement of purpose/mission. Perhaps this accounts for the estimation that less than five percent of the colleges and universities in the South utilize an institutional planning process which could be described as having a significant impact on institutional decision making (Nichols and Clark, 1983).

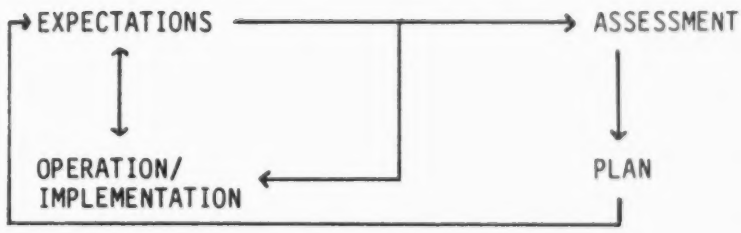
From the SACS' viewpoint, there should be relative consistency/coherence in the process throughout an institution which could hardly occur without systematic institutional planning tied to decision making. The criterion states that an

effective institution must establish adequate procedures for planning and evaluation. It must define expected results (goals) and describe how the achievement of these results (goals) will be ascertained. The criterion emphasizes procedure and process, but does not define the nature of the procedure or process. It does not define the nature of the institutional purpose/mission, the institutional plans, institutional expectations/goals and evaluative procedures, all of which may vary by institution. A written unified institutional plan is not required by the criterion, neither is a planning officer, nor an office of institutional research/planning. Institutions have an opportunity to use their own creativity in responding to the accrediting group. The flexibility provided is advantageous to institutions particularly in an era of financial constraints.

What then does SACS require of its 700-member postsecondary education institutions? An attempt to answer that question at one institution produced the effectiveness process model shown in Figure 1. The model shows the relationships among the elements involved under the SACS' criterion in the institutional effectiveness process. A similar process is involved for the various subparts of the organization.

Figure 1

EFFECTIVENESS PROCESS



The effectiveness questions raised by the Criteria seem quite repetitive. The same idea is expressed and the same material is asked for under other sections of the document. In every case, it seems, the first question seeks some statement of the institutional expectations for that area. The second question seems, almost invariably, to be about assessment. How, given these expectations or goals, does the institution assess the extent to which expectations are being met? The third question, then, asks how this assessment information is used to modify the institution's planning for that aspect of its operation. And last, although it is not asked explicitly every time, the implication is that the institution should be able to provide some evidence that these plans are, in fact, being implemented.

"Must" Statements

Underlying Section III, Institutional Effectiveness, are the "must" statements. If an institution is to be reaccredited, the SACS' visitation team must answer affirmatively the group of effectiveness-related statements, not limited to Section III, provided in Figure 2. The visitation team evaluates each statement from the viewpoint of the whole institution. Since any college or university is the sum of its component parts, principal administrators have been asked to consider these effective statements. The matrix provides an internal score card for a self-analysis of the entire university. The matrix stimulates communication and cooperation which, in turn, lead to a self-correcting process.

A steering committee of the self-study reviewed the Criteria and Manual prepared by the Commission on Colleges and found that information must be obtained from all units of the university. A worksheet, designed and written by SACS (1985) for use of the visiting committee, was modified to obtain the answers

Figure 2

Institutional Effectiveness-Related "Must" Statement Matrix

Code: 1 = Yes 2 = No 3 = Not applicable		Vice President Acad. Affairs	Vice President Fin. Affairs	Vice President Inst. Advanc.	Vice President Planning	Vice President Research	Director of Admissions	Dean of Students	Director of Cont. Ed.	Librarian	Registrar	Academic Deans
Sec.	Questions											
I.	Master plan for phys. & ed. growth											
II.	Planning & eval. processes demonstrate purpose and role being fulfilled											
III.	Procedures for planning and evaluation											
	Defines expected educational results											
	Description of how achievement of results will be ascertained											
	If maintains research or public service missions, it develops and implements appropriate procedures for evaluation effectiveness											
	Shows evidence of research designed to support its planning and evaluation functions											
	Uses research function for continuing study, analysis, appraisal of programs, policies, procedures and programs											
	Regularly evaluates research function											
IV.	Regularly evaluates admissions policies											
	Defines process by which curriculum established											
	Process established to improve instruction											
	Goals of each course understood by faculty and students											
	Evaluations of students re: quality levels of performance											
	Periodically studies effectiveness of instr.											
	Grad. instruction evaluated and results used											
	Continuing education goals established											
	Evaluation of off-campus classes											
	Assignment of faculty responsibilities											
	Evaluation of individual faculty members											
	Guidelines for evaluating faculty											
	Measure performance against criteria											
	Orientation, etc. of part-time faculty											
	Orientation, etc. of GTAs											
V.	Evaluation of library programs											
	Evaluation of cooperative library arrangements											
	Evaluation of student development services											
VI.	Resources used to achieve goals											
	Evaluates effectiveness of administrators											
	Sound budget processes											
	Plan for upkeep of property											
	Annual plan for upkeep of property											
	Maintains and evaluates safety plan											
	Facilities master plan											

needed on effectiveness for nine self-study committees in writing their reports. The worksheet is being used as an educational, as well as an information gathering process. Respondents were asked to document a "yes" answer on the worksheet. In areas where "no" was indicated the respondents were asked "to consider what actions need to be taken within your area and include these as recommendations." Obviously, any deficiencies found will be corrected if possible prior to the SACS visitation with faculty and administrators working in tandem.

Institutional Research Involvement

Most SACS self-studies provide opportunity, challenge, and visibility for an office of institutional research. The reports issued illustrate institutional study efforts under Criterion 3.2.

As one institution enters into its self-study for a visitation in 18 months the involvement of an office of institutional research, thus far, has entailed:

1. The Director serves as the resource member of the Effectiveness Committee.

2. The Director and Assistant Director have been called on as consultants in survey designs.

3. A catalog of institutional research report titles over the past five years along with other informational sources has been formulated and grouped by the new Criteria. This catalog was distributed through the Self-Study Office to the Steering Committee members and Chairmen of other Self-Study Committees.

4. Annual publications of the office have been called for and provided to the same distribution shown above. These included a five-year series of Abstracts of Institutional Research and the Fact Book.

5. Two staff papers have been written as background to members of the Effectiveness Committee: one on planning within the State system of higher education and the other on student assessment and institutional effectiveness.

6. An institutional environmental analysis has been completed and a student demographic study is underway.

Certainly, any institution which has made a commitment to the establishment of an on-going institutional research function is in a good position to answer in the affirmative the "must" statements under Criterion 3.2. SACS does not mandate an office, but it does do so for the function (Jones, 1986).

Implications

The quality issue in higher education has been recognized and acted upon by the College Delegate Assembly of SACS. H.R. Kells (1986) judges the establishment of the effectiveness criterion to be an extremely important action for higher education in the South. He believes that by this action "SACS will also have an effect on all of U.S. accrediting, and, through it all U.S. higher education institutions" (p.4).

Some institutions in the South will embrace genuinely the planning and evaluation expectations promulgated by SACS and retain control of their own destinies. Others will give token attention by generating outdated planning concept document of the 60's. Undoubtedly, increased expectations of systematic planning and evaluation by external forces will increase tension among and within colleges and universities, but this could result in positive change. Barbe and Sullivan (1982) summed up the planning dimensions in a collegiate environment:

> If faculty and chairmen focus their planning efforts on courses and curriculum, if academic deans and administrators plan the academic policies that will be successful in the complex environment of the 1980's and 1990's, if governors plan for insuring that the public trust of higher education is well-placed, then the dimensions of planning will be addressed. If the groups involved in planning interact with dignity and direction, then the enormous educational issues of this decade will become manageable (p. 286).

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